

River Ecology & Governance Task Force

We Will Chicago Input Session

Oct. 25, 2022

Participants: 13

Environment, Climate, and Energy

Scoring Objectives – Goal 4: Maintain and expand green space, natural resources, and conservation efforts for the benefit of all Chicagoans.

1. Invest in land restoration and stewardship, especially in neighborhoods with existing environmental burdens. **(4.2)**
2. Acquire open space and provide equitable and improved access across the city. **(4.3)**
3. Maximize the use of native plants in preserves, parks, and parkways. **(4.6)**
4. Invest in the expansion of Chicago's urban tree canopy. **(4.6)**
5. Create open space or corridor easements around industrial zones. **(4.1)**
6. Require infrastructure to be designed and built sustainably with public access for people of all abilities. **(4.5)**
7. Protect Chicago's freshwater resources as the climate changes. **(5)**
8. Work with Indigenous leaders to protect and support indigenous land stewardship principles. **(4.3)**

General discussion about ECE Objectives:

- It's easy to vote 5's across the board because the ideas are so general.
- How are we going to measure these in a way that ensures we are achieving them? To what extent will these be tracked?
 - For example: the landscape ordinance requires a certain amount of native and on-native plants; Expanding the tree canopy by 10% v. 20%
- The term "freshwater resources" can encapsulate rivers, but would prefer it to say rivers specifically
- Does "corridor easements around industrial zones" refer to buffer zones?
- The goal overall has an anthropomorphic lens – very human-centric. What about the wellbeing of other species?
- "Acquire open space" – some concern about open space v. public space, distinguish between privately accessible and publicly accessible open space
- Prioritizing goals, which of these seem most urgent? Are some more opportune than others?

How can this (ECE) goal be implemented to benefit Chicago's Rivers system? How can the rivers be included in the implementation of these objectives?

- Annual funding mechanism or budget aligned with this – City will make X amount of funding available for goals.
 - High level plan should provide strategy for budgeting, prioritizing nature-based solutions

- Reframe the river system and think about it holistically as a publicly managed asset for public benefit, especially for mental health.
- The river can be a unifying / intersection point for a vision for the city; a focal point for intersecting goals across the plan
- Implementation is led by property owners / developers – could there be a more proactive way to spur improvements and implementation?
- Prioritize green-infrastructure based stormwater solutions
- A focus on watershed approach with multi-benefit nature-based solutions that protect waterways and communities at the same time. One that recognizes the relationship between land use and waterways.

Additional Objectives

- **Housing and Neighborhoods – Objective 3.5:** Enhance public spaces, schools, parks, services and public infrastructure in underserved communities. **(4.7)**
- **Public Health and Safety – Objective 5.1:** Enhance accessibility, safety, and quality of public spaces. **(4.9)**
- **Transportation and Infrastructure – Objective 5.3:** Invest in transportation and infrastructure projects that support resilience and protect water and other natural resources. **(4.9)**

How can these objectives be implemented to benefit Chicago's Rivers system? How can the rivers be included in the implementation of these objectives?

- Green infrastructure is a core infrastructure strategy.
- Be more explicit about the river in these goals. (e.g. protect *waterways* not just *water*)
- Update existing ordinances to more actively advance these goals.
- 2 Goals use the language of “enhance” regarding assets in underserved communities raises questions about gentrification – increasing commercial development leading to increases in property taxes
 - Not just a matter of enhancement – maintenance, upkeep, and safety are critical, both of existing resources and anything new
- Water infrastructure is really missing – stormwater, pipes
 - Stormwater not mentioned in ECE pillar or T&I pillar goals
- A range of things that involve infrastructure development could use the river corridors as a way to “hang” several efforts on. For example, Green infrastructure demonstration project, park improvements, public access, other infrastructure development.
- Calumet and landfills that align part of the system – solid waste management. The effect of recycling policy on the rivers system – coordinated system for landfill closure process and future of those sites.